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## Blueprint Outlines How Digital Tools Can Improve Schools

By [Sean Cavanagh](#) on October 3, 2013 2:32 PM | [No comments](#)

A professional association of district technology leaders is offering advice to school officials on how they can transform schools using digital tools—by sharpening their focus on everything from teachers' professional development to community engagement.

**"Seven Keys to Unlocking School Transformation With Digital Media,"** published by the Consortium for School Networking, is meant to help district officials avoid the stumbles that can prevent technology from being used effectively. The consortium drew ideas from a group of school district leaders around the country, who are contributing authors to the document.

The report will probably also prove useful to companies trying to determine districts' technology needs, in that it speaks to where schools experience the most difficulty, and how they're attempting to overcome those barriers.

The authors point to seven key steps districts need to take in implementing digital media:

- **Change the culture of classrooms.** Schools need to promote new ways for teachers and students to interact using technology, through rules and policies, and through professional development and other means.
- **Involve the entire staff—as well as parents and students.** As an example, the report cites the Fairfax County, Va., school system's creation of a "student advisory council," which weighs in on tech and other issues.
- **Align district policies to support innovation.** Districts need to recognize when technology can be beneficial, and then adjust. A few years ago, for instance, many schools banned smartphones

from classrooms. But eventually, after recognizing those devices' ubiquity, districts began finding ways to integrate them into instruction.

- **Go for scale.** The authors argue that districts should be bold, and attempt to ramp up their use of digital media, rather than limiting those efforts to individual teachers and classrooms.

- **Rethink professional development.** Training sessions held before or after schools "are not conducive to meaningful and relevant learning," the authors argue. Schools instead need to rework resources and schedules in broader ways that set clear objectives and allow teachers to work with each other.

- **Round up school board support.** The best way to win the backing of board members for digital media is to get them in classrooms, the report says.

"Board members who understand and support changes underway can reduce the likelihood of problems turning into crises," the authors say.

- **Focus on teacher education.** Teachers' lack of tech knowledge is widely viewed as a **hurdle standing in the way of districts' efforts** to use digital tools to help students. The report highlights partnerships between school districts and colleges of education, and an undergraduate teacher-training program, at Clemson University, that rewrote its curriculum to incorporate digital media.

Those ideas are not meant as a "recipe," the consortium says, but rather tools for "stimulating the creativity of others who are on the same path we are."

On a related note: see *Education Week's* new special report, "**Managing the Digital District**," which is full of stories exploring the challenges school leaders face in trying to implement technology in wise ways.